



State Of Connecticut

SENATE
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HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr.
Senate President Pro Tempore

On

Senate Bill 1002: An Act Concerning Community Schools

Committee on Education

March 4, 2013

Good Morning.

Rep. Fleischmann, Sen. Stillman, members of the Education Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today on Senate Bill 1002, An Act Concerning Community Schools.

Let me start by saying that I am a strong believer in the role of *public* education in America and in the State of Connecticut. Our public schools, our neighborhood schools, are a crucial part of our country's future. They open the doors of opportunity for our children.

At the end of the 2012 legislative session, after months of extensive deliberation on an education reform package, I knew that our job was not done. It became clear to me that we needed better public options for schools that take into consideration the assets and challenges of our schools, our neighborhoods and our families. Senator Stillman and I met with various stakeholders last year to discuss these issues. We wanted to find a better way to address obstacles to success by finding solutions within our communities. This bill is the result of the efforts of those who are joining me here today, and I thank them for their good work.

We have already put in place some of the resources necessary for successful community schools. Last year we created 1000 new slots in early childhood education, provided resources for new school based health clinics and family resource centers, and created new job training and hiring incentives for employers. There is, however, more to do.

SB 1002 provides a framework for improving our public schools by recognizing that no child and no school exists in a vacuum. Community schools draw upon partnerships within the surrounding community – they provide a collaborative and grassroots model rather than a top down approach, and offer a positive alternative to stripping away local control and privatizing our public education system.

This legislation allows local school districts to designate community schools in their districts, instructs them to conduct an audit of the current school resources, identify community resources that serve local students and their families, and develop a plan to coordinate these existing programs in a comprehensive and consistent manner.

Community schools emphasize values beyond testing and evaluations; they recognize that children are best prepared to learn when they have had quality early childhood education and come to school ready to learn, when they are not hungry and have access to health care, when their parents are involved in their children's education and have access to a Parent's Academy to assist with continuing education and employment.

Efforts nationwide to develop community schools have delivered results. In Cincinnati, Washington, D.C, Syracuse, Washington State, Maryland and California, researchers have found that community schools have contributed to higher attendance rates, higher rates of parent involvement, more job training for parents, lower rates of discipline problems, higher self-esteem for students, and increased academic achievement. All of these efforts have led to lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates and better economic opportunities for students and their families.

Dr. Helen Ladd, a Duke University Professor, co-chair of the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education campaign and a leading scholar on the connection between poverty and student achievement has said, "let's agree that we know a lot about how to address the ways in which poverty undermines student learning. Whether we choose to face up to that reality is ultimately a moral question."

Dr. Ladd also said, "schools can't do it alone. Accountability is a pillar of our education system, but schools need the support of the community – both before children arrive at school and during their school years – for all children to achieve high standards."

This bill aims to improve our schools in the context of the communities where our students live. It is not blind to the needs of children who lack the advantages of those who attend school in our wealthiest neighborhoods. This common-sense approach of understanding the challenges our children face, and securing the connection between community and our schools, provides the best chance of not only reducing the achievement gap, but of narrowing the opportunity gap. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and I urge your support.